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Two Forged Antiques. — By RICHARD GOTTHEIL, Professor in Columbia University, New York City.

Archaeological frauds have been multiplying rapidly of late, and this country has become a dumping-ground for forgeries of many kinds. Not a few modern antiques—aged long before their time—have found a resting place in our public and private collections.

It has fallen to my lot to assist in the exposure of several such frauds. In 1890 I brought to the attention of this Society an Alhambra vase belonging to this category; in 1909, a pair of beautiful doors said to have come from the madrasah of the Mameluke Sultan Barkūk, in Cairo; and in the same year, a manuscript of that arch-forger of Arabic History in the Island of Sicily, Vella. This last-named forgery is one of the two described in the following pages.

A. A Remarkable Gold Amulet.

During the last five or six years a certain number of amulets made of gold or silver foil have come to light, covered for the most part with Hebrew inscriptions. With the exception of one or two, these amulets are now in the possession of the New York Public Library. They are said to have been found in graves excavated at Irbid in the Hauran; a statement which rests entirely upon the good faith (God save the mark!) of the dealers themselves. At the last meeting of this society, Professor Montgomery favored us with a translation of two of these amulets. Since then, one further copy has been brought to this country, which raises the number of these objects in the New York Public Library to six. It is with the sixth that the present paper has to do.

In size and general appearance, it is easily recognized as belonging to the same class as the other amulets, though it is the first of the larger size to be presented in gold. As an ord-

inary amulet, it would not especially arouse our interest; but when we come to examine the writing upon it, our curiosity is engaged. The surface is divided into two fields, which are evidently quite distinct one from the other. The first field contains writing evidently meant to be either Phoenician or old Aramaic—a strange circumstance in itself, as the previous finds seem to point to a community of Jews living in Irbid during the first centuries of our era, when the Aramaic script had long given way to the so-called square characters. This circumstance, however, might pass; it would only make it necessary that we revise our dates in connection with this community. But the Aramaic inscription contains nothing but variations of portions of the ordinary Semitic alphabet, first in its regular and secondly in its reverse order; the so-called *abgad*, and its complement the *tashrak*. Even so, we might hesitate to declare ourselves doubters, when we remember the many uses made of the alphabet by mystics of early times and down through the Middle Ages; or, again, our amulet-maker might have belonged to the class of simple-minded and God-fearing men, like the monk in the story of Luther, who told merely the alphabet on their beads, preferring that God himself should put the letters into words pleasing in His sight. Yet, we are led to doubt the simplicity of the simple-minded man in our own case, for he has mixed up Phoenician or Aramaic letters of various epochs and has used some which belong to no epoch at all. Finally, at the end of the first two fields, he has added a line of letters that to all intents and purposes are Samaritan in character.

The examination of the second field confirms us as doubters. The Aramaic inscription in equivocal characters to which is attached a line of Samaritan is bad enough; but when to this is joined an old Babylonian inscription, the climax is certainly reached. For the Babylonian inscription is an old acquaintance found on a mace head of Sargon of Agade, whose name and title it gives.¹

This much, at least, can be said: the forger of the amulet was a man of no ordinary talent. He certainly had imagin-

¹ Shar ganni | Shar ali | Shar A-ga-de ^{ki} | a-na | ^{ilu} Shamash | in ^{ilu} Ud-Kib- | nun ^{ki} (=Sippar). See, e. g. Ball, *Light from the East*, p. 52; Radau p. 161, note.

ation, and a sense of historical proportion, if historical importance is measured by bigness. He has roamed at will over a space of some three or four thousand years; but we should be thankful to him for this, for it has enabled us the more easily to follow his somewhat tortuous footsteps.

B. The "Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr".

Authentic documents from the early centuries of Mohammedan dominion are of rare occurrence, and therefore are highly prized. It is only of late that the finds of Egyptian papyri have begun to yield of their fulness something in the service of Mohammedan studies. The hand of time and the negligence of man have ruthlessly destroyed the mass of records that must have existed in the chancelleries of the various Moslem empires. I was accordingly much surprised and delighted when, in 1908,¹ I was shown a manuscript (said to have been brought to this country by an Italian sailor) bearing the title "Book of the Dīwān of Egypt".² The volume had all the outward marks of great age; even the bookworm had left many traces on the pages. The edges of the codex had been frayed, and each page was set in paper that was very evidently of much later date than the original. My interest was deepened still further by the deciphering of the opening paragraph. The manuscript contained nothing less than a copy of the letters which had come to the Egyptian Caliph Al-Mustanṣir Billāh (1035—1094) from Arab rulers in Sicily and Tunis, and the answers of the Caliph to them; and the copy—it was asserted—had been made at the instance of the Caliph himself in the year of the Hejira 467. Here, indeed, was a find of considerable importance; for the reign of Al-Mustanṣir was long and important.

I had hardly gotten as far as this, when doubts began to be raised in my mind. How did the scribes of al-Mustanṣir come to write in a well-defined Maghrebi script? True, it was not the intertwined and entangled script in which later Maghrebis delight; but it bore all the hall-marks of this extraordinary development of Arabic writing. The manuscript

¹ The account of this forgery was read at a meeting of this Society in the spring of 1909.

² كتاب ديوان مصر.



might indeed be a later copy of an earlier original. But, if the script was intertwined and entangled, what adjectives were fit to qualify the language it expressed? None that I could find. It was quite evidently Arabic—or was intended to be—but it was the most impossible Arabic that I had ever seen. Very soon certain peculiarities which were easily recognized as Maltese and Tunisian came to view, but most of the sentences could not be construed even upon the very liberal basis laid down by Arab grammarians. Through some of them shimmered an Italian construction or an Italian word composition. This was too much even for a willing believer. And the doubt once aroused very quickly entrained others. The thin brown paper was entirely foreign to Arabic manuscripts; the artistic design of the frontispiece was as un-Oriental and as un-Arabic as it could be. But enough! The story is as follows:

In the year 1782, there was in Palermo a certain Giuseppe Vella, a Maltese by birth, a member of the Jerusalem order and afterwards Abbot of St. Pancrace. At the time he was Chaplain at the Abbey of St. Martin, three leagues distant from Palermo. As a Maltese, he was naturally familiar with the local Arabic dialect of his birth-place; but he was ignorant of literary Arabic as well as of Mohammedan history. There happened to be four or five Arabic manuscripts in the library of St. Martin's, and when a certain Mohammed ibn Uthmān came in 1782 as ambassador of Morocco to the court of Naples, he visited St. Martin's near Palermo. Whether because Mohammed ibn Uthmān and Vella could in a measure understand each other's speech, or not, the two formed an acquaintance that was destined to be productive of much evil for students of Arabic. For hardly had the Moroccan delegate left when Vella announced the discovery in St. Martin's of a valuable Arabic manuscript giving the history of the Arabs in the Island of Sicily. A few years later (1786), having kept up by correspondence his connection with the Moroccan delegate, he noised abroad the receipt of another important manuscript found at Fez, containing the correspondence between the Norman princes, Count Roger and Duke Robert Guiscard, and the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir in Egypt. King Ferdinand of Sicily became deeply interested in these discoveries, and even went so far as to send Vella and three

students to Fez upon a mission of enquiry for other manuscripts dealing with the same subject. Patriotic Sicilians joined their king. Among these was Monseignor Airoidi, Archbishop of Heraclea, Judge of the Apostolic Legation and of the Monarchy of Sicily, who paid all the expenses connected with the publication of the volumes and even had Arabic type sent especially from Parma for the purpose. Six volumes of this history appeared between the years 1789 and 1792,¹ Vella hiding his own personality behind that of a suppositious Muṣṭafa ibn Hānī. Airoidi had even commenced the publication of these texts in Latin and Italian, in 1788 (48 pp.).² Writers on the history of Sicily generally accepted the manuscript as genuine, and Wahl, Rossi, Ferrara, Piazzzi, etc. made use of it in their works. Even so good a scholar as Olaus Gerard Tychsen at Rostock was caught in the trap of the wily Maltese, and republished a small portion in his "*Elementale arabicum*" (Rostock, 1792), and a professor in Stuttgart, P. W. G. Hausleutner, translated the first four volumes into German under the title "*Geschichte der Araber in Sicilien*"³ (1791—92). The Pope even lent his consideration to the fraud by a profuse letter of thanks, dated 1790. But there were not wanting conscientious students who quickly saw through the very evident fraud. Joseph Hager was called to Palermo in 1794 by the king himself; and in 1796 Monseignor Adami, Bishop of Aleppo, who was on his way from Rome to his own diocese, was bidden to Sicily to examine the precious manuscript. Both men pronounced the manuscript a stupid forgery,⁴ the latter even writing a treatise in German which

¹ Mustafa ibn Hani, *Codice diplomatico di Sicilia sotto il governo degli Arabi, pubblicato per opere e studio di A. Airoidi*. Palermo, 1789—1792. See *Catalogue of the Printed Books in the British Museum*; Graesse, *Trésor de livres rares et précieux*, 1867, VI, 274; I, 48. Cfr. Amari, *Storia dei Musselmani in Sicilia* I, p. XI.

² *Codex diplomaticus Siciliae sub Saracenorum imperio ab anno 827 ad 1072; nunc primum ex Mss. Mauro-occidentalibus depromptus cura et studio A. Airoidi*. Panormi 1788 (pp. 1—48).

³ *Geschichte der Araber in Sicilien und Siciliens unter der Herrschaft der Araber. In gleichzeitigen Urkunden von diesem Volk selbst. Aus dem Italiänischen. Mit Anmerkungen und Zusätzen*. 4 vols. Königsberg 1791—92.

⁴ The report of Adami is published, together with a letter by the Chevalier d'Italinsky, in von Hammer's *Fundgruben des Orients*, vol. I (1809), pp. 236 sq.

was afterwards published in a French translation.¹ In the meanwhile Vella had gone ahead with the printing of his second manuscript containing the correspondence between the Norman princes and the Egyptian Caliph. This was undertaken by the king himself and gotten out in two editions—one folio and one quarto—in regal style, the Arabic text side by side with the translation.² In this edition Guiseppe Vella's name is mentioned as translator with the ornate title, "Capelano del sac. ordine Gerosolimitano, Abate di Sant. Pancragio, Prof. di lingua araba nella reale academia di Palermo e socio nazionale della reale academia della scienze". The first volume, containing no less than 370 pp., appeared in 1793 and the second was in the press when the bubble burst. Vella was arrested and tried before three different tribunals and condemned. But it is evident either that the authorities did not consider the crime to be a serious one, or that strong influence was exerted in his behalf. He was condemned simply to seclusion in a small villa at Mozzo Monreale, a suburb of Palermo.

In such manner was finished the first act of the drama; and it would seem that with the final condemnation of Vella the whole matter could be relegated to the lumber-room or finally classed among the rather numerous forgeries which have been committed at the expense of the Orient. But after the lapse of more than one hundred years, the forgeries of Vella received a new lease of life; and in order that this lease of life may be cut short, or at least not transferred to these shores, I ask the attention of the Society for a few moments longer. About the year 1905 a certain Varvaro read a paper before the "Società Siciliana per la Storia Patria" in Palermo—but which does not appear in its publications—in which he tried to establish the thesis that Vella had not entirely falsified the manuscripts that he brought forward, but that he

¹ I have not been able to see the German original. The title of the French translation is: *Relation d'une insigne Imposture Littéraire découverte dans un Voyage fait en Sicile en 1794*. Par Mr. le Dr. Hager. Traduit de l'Allemand, Erlangen 1799.

² كتاب ديوان مصر *Libro del consiglio de Egitto etc.* Palermo, Reale Stamperia, 1793. Cfr. Zenker, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, I, p. 94. A portion of this was republished in 1794 by the secretary of the Palermo Academy "del Bon Gusto" for use in one of the seminaries.

had based them upon authentic documents of great value which were in his possession, and that Vella's manuscripts might still be of great service in studying the history of Sicily in its relations with various Mohammedan states. The manuscripts to which he referred were not the two sequestered at the time of the arrest of Vella, for these are still, I am reliably informed, in the Archivio di Stato at Palermo. It seems that after Vella had been relegated to the villa in Mozzo Monreale he continued to write Arabic manuscripts. These formed parts of Vella's effects which passed on to his family and were preserved instead of being destroyed. The Varvaros are distantly related to the Vella family, and in course of time have become possessed of the books which (being entirely ignorant of Arabic) they consider to be of great value, and which they now desire to sell. At the meeting referred to, Varvaro brought with him one of the manuscripts. Professor Carlo A. Nallino, an eminent Arabic scholar, formerly of Naples but now connected with the University of Palermo, recognized immediately that it was not a genuine work, and later in the house of the Varvaros he saw two or three more of the manuscripts, one of which was the *Kitāb Diwān Miṣr*.

It is this last volume, evidently a copy of the original corpus delicti, which has at length been sold, and has found its way (together with sundry other Italian things) to this country, in the hope that it may be sold here to some credulous American. Its sole value is a mournful one, and it belongs, by all right, in a Museum of Criminology.

In conclusion, I ought to say that I am indebted to Professor Nallino for the information contained in the second part of this paper.¹

¹ Note, 4/8/13. In his translation of al-Ṣairafi's description of the Egyptian "Foreign Office" at the time of the Fatimides, M. Henri Massé has been led astray by the title, and has classified the "*Kitāb Diwān Miṣr*" among the "recueils de modèles épistolaires à l'usage de la Chancellerie"! See his *Ibn al-Ḥairafi: Code de la Chancellerie d'Égypte; Extrait du Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'archéologie Orientale*, Tome XI, Le Caire, 1913, p. 67.